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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to study a school district in a small American city to understand who controls school curriculum in the local community. The research approach used was reputational analysis, a survey method whereby the reputed influence of leaders is measured rather than taken for granted. Also used was a technique developed by Bonjean and Noland to identify visible, concealed, and symbolic leaders in the community. Findings showed that those who influence curriculum decision-making in the local community do no work overtly. Their power is in the minds of others who, for unknown reasons, allow themselves to be influenced. The study offers two warnings about reputational analysis. First, when school officials use this method to communicate with community leaders, serious legal, political, and democratic-ethical problems are raised. Second, this method weighs reputations more heavily than actions so that its very use results in the discovery of elitism and hierarchy. (Author/LD)

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WHO INFLUENCES CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKING IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

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WHO INFLUENCES CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKING

IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

The purpose of this research was to study a school district in a small American city in order to understand who controls school curriculum in the local community.[1] Because the research method was "naturalistic"--meaning that observation was unguided by strict hypotheses formed in advance, and structured experimental designs were not imposed before the collection of data[2]--definitions of central concepts were purposely open and expansive. "Control" was defined as imposing meaning upon a situation or imposing one's definition upon the other actors in a situation.[3] According to the dictum of Thomas and Thomas, if persons "define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."[4] Thus "curriculum" became what others said it was or took it to be. As research progressed, the question of curriculum control became operationalized as who makes local curriculum decisions, who in the local community influences those decisions, and who benefits? In the phase of research reported here, attention was directed to the second question: who in the local community influences curriculum decisions?

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[1]The complete study is reported in "Who Controls the Curriculum in the Local Community? A Case Study of Community Power and Curriculum Decision-Making" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, School of Education, Indiana University).

[2]Urie Bronfenbrenner, "The Experimental Ecology of Education," Teachers College Record, LXVIII, No. 2 (December, 1976), 158.

[3]Alan Dawe, "The Two Sociologies," British Journal of Sociology, XXXI, No. 2 (June, 1970), 213.

[4]William I. Thomas and Dorothy Swain Thomas, The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1928), p. 572.

"Reputational" methods were used to locate persons in the community who might influence the school curriculum. Reputational analysis, as developed by Hunter[5] refers to a survey method whereby the reputed influence of leaders is measured, rather than taken for granted as a function of their overt actions or their incumbency in positions of wealth or official authority.

This study exists at the theoretical intersection of two traditions of research: field research as practiced by the Lynds[6] and others such as Hollingshead,[7] Vidich and Bensman,[8] and more recently Peshkin,[9] and sociology of knowledge, including the curriculum work of Young and others.[10] The field researchers have given us an image of local communities controlled by advantaged groups who have little to gain from change. The sociologists of knowledge have argued that curriculum is socially organized knowledge serving to legitimate society's dominant groups. An important question

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[5]Floyd Hunter, Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1953).

[6]Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown: A Study in American Culture (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929). Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1937).

[7]August B. Hollingshead, Elmtown's Youth and Elmtown Revisited (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1975).

[8]Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, Small Town in Mass Society: Class, Power and Religion in a Rural Community (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1960).

[9]Alan Peshkin, "Whom Shall the Schools Serve?" Curriculum Inquiry, VI, No. 3 (1977), 181-204.

[10]Michael F. D. Young (ed.), Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971).

is, are local communities and the curricula in their schools mutually reinforcing?

The research site was Limestone County, a rural midwestern county of 90,000 residents, and the Limestone County Community School Corporation (LCCSC). Ridgebrook, the county seat, is a small city of 50,000 and the home of Midwest State University, a large public institution.[11] Using an array of field research methods, it was determined that Ridgebrook/Limestone County is a community of compromise where the inclination is to avoid conflicts stemming from some very pronounced social dichotomies. The school district apes the community. Public curriculum decisions are made with an eye out for public reaction, and yet classroom decisions are unsupervised and unaccounted for. It was concluded that the curriculum fails to provide a mode of criticism in the community and instead supports a tendency to perpetuate existing unequal social arrangements.

Method of Investigation

Who are Limestone County's school influentials,[12] and what is their interest in curriculum? A useful method for investigating such questions is the technique developed by Bonjean and Noland to identify visible, concealed, and symbolic leaders in a community.[13] The Bonjean-

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[11] To preserve the anonymity of respondents, all proper names in the community have been altered.

[12] "School influentials" refer to those non-salaried citizens who are reputed to be of most influence and power in school decision-making.

[13] Charles M. Bonjean, "Community Leadership: A Case Study and Conceptual Refinement," The American Journal of Sociology, LXVIII, No. 6 (May, 1963), 672-81. Bonjean developed his study under the direction of E. William Noland at the University of North Carolina.

Noland technique extends the reputational method in such a way that it becomes possible to explore differences among leaders as well as common leadership characteristics. The method is easily adapted for use by educational researchers pursuing questions of informal community influence on schools and school curriculum.

In the original study and in a later replication,[14] it was found that leaders who are rated as being most influential in a community make significantly different choices of leaders than do less highly regarded leaders. Individuals who are ranked substantially higher by top ranking leaders than by lower ranking leaders are designated "concealed" leaders because they are believed to have more influence than is generally recognized by other leaders and the community at large. Conversely, those individuals ranked substantially lower by top ranking leaders than by others are "symbolic" leaders who probably have less influence than they are generally reputed to have. "Visible" leaders, then, are persons whom top ranking and lower ranking leaders rate about equally; it is believed that their leadership roles are well known in the community. Most important, both studies found that certain distinctive characteristics could be associated with visible, concealed, and symbolic leaders, and that the method would not discover a monolithic power elite in a community if one did not in fact exist.

As Miller and Dirksen have observed, a basic assumption underlying this procedure is that assessments of individual influence made by

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[14] Delbert C. Miller and James L. Dirksen, "The Identification of Visible, Concealed, and Symbolic Leaders in a Small Indiana City: A Replication of the Bonjean-Noland Study of Burlington, North Carolina," Social Forces, XLIII, No. 4 (May, 1965), 548-55.

those leaders held to be most influential in a community will be more accurate than assessments made by others.[15] This assumption seems altogether reasonable, for "key influentials," the acknowledged leaders among influentials, are more likely than others to participate in important decisions and more likely to have access to various community settings.

In order to assemble a comprehensive list of school influentials, six judges were asked to suggest top persons in the community who influence school decision-making, not including current school board members or school district employees. The six judges were the current school board president, a past school board president, the superintendent, the two assistant superintendents, and the director of elementary education. Forty-three "top school influentials" were identified by the judges, and all forty-three were interviewed between October 31 and December 14, 1977, using the schedule attached as an appendix.

The interviews lasted from twenty minutes to several hours. When a respondent knew about a pertinent issue or incident, the questioning became investigative. At other times, interviews were conversational in order to hear respondents' stories and to remain open to new insights. The technique was to pose specific questions from the interview schedule in such a way that they did not interfere with what respondents themselves wanted to talk about.

The Population

Several characteristics of the forty-three top school influentials are exhibited in Table 1. No significant differences in sex or political

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[15] Ibid., p. 548.

affiliation are present in the group as a whole, and most institutional sectors are represented, with two exceptions being recreation and labor. The average age of the group is about fifty-two.

TABLE 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF TOP SCHOOL INFLUENTIALS (N = 43)

Categories	Percentages[a]
Age[6]	
30-39	7.0
40-49	30.2
50-59	39.5
60-69	14.0
70-79	9.3
Sex	
Males	58.1
Females	41.9
Location of residence	
East side of Ridgebrook	88.3
West side of Ridgebrook	7.0
Rural Limestone County	4.7
Occupation	
Business and finance	20.9
Politics and government	18.6
Education	11.6
Housewife--husband in education	11.6
Housewife--husband not in education	9.3
Law and medicine	9.3
Religion	9.3
Mass communication	4.6
Social welfare	4.6
Political affiliation	
Democratic	51.2
Republican	48.8
Membership in community organizations	
Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis, League of Women Voters, Rotary, or School Foundation	72.1
Other memberships	27.9

[a]Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

[b]Mean age = 52.7 years.

In Ridgebrook, location of residence is a clear indication of income level--east side property values are much higher on the average than west side or rural county property values--and here the group of influentials is very unrepresentative of the community as a whole.

Almost three-fourths of the top school influentials belong to one of five community organizations--the Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis, the League of Women Voters, Rotary, or the School Foundation--and many belong to more than one. Superintendent Gray is a member of Rotary, he is the school district's representative in the Chamber of Commerce, and he founded the School Foundation. Five principals belong to Kiwanis, moreover, and the president of the school board plus leaders in the county PTA council are active in the League of Women Voters. By and large, then, top school influentials in Limestone County are upper-income community leaders who retain a continuing interest in the public schools.

Each of the forty-three persons interviewed was asked to choose five thought to be most influential, as follows:

> Without passing judgment on them or their ideas, please name the five persons from the list whom you feel are most influential in initiating, supporting or vetoing actions that have considerable effect on our schools. You may add names of your own choosing if they are not on my list, but do not include members of the school board or school district staff.

When the total number of votes received by each individual was tabulated, the fifteen who received five or more votes were taken to be the "key school influentials." Table 2 lists the fifteen key influentials and the percentage of votes received from all forty-three leaders.

TABLE 2

KEY SCHOOL INFLUENTIALS CHOSEN BY VOTES OF 43 INFLUENTIALS

Key School Influential Chosen	Percentage of Votes
1. Steve Anderson, Newspaper Editor	58.1
2. Agnes Billingham, Community Leader	48.8
3. Anne Cooper, State Assembly Representative	30.2
4. Rex Dillon, Attorney	27.9
5. Darren Eastman, Professor	23.3
6. Phyllis Fanning, Community Activist	23.3
7. Hector Gurley, Industrialist	18.6
8. Carol Henderson, Community Volunteer	16.3
9. Ron Isaacs, Judge	16.3
10. Sue Jackson, Community Watchperson	14.0
11. Joseph Koerner, University Chancellor	14.0
12. Lewis Long, Pediatrician	14.0
13. Fred Merrill, Professor	11.6
14. Greg Newberg, City Editor	11.6
15. Terry O'Neill, Priest	11.6

In order to identify visible, concealed, and symbolic leaders, the rankings of the fifteen key influentials were weighted. The five choices made by Anderson, the top ranked leader, were given a weight of fifteen, the choices of Billingham were given a weight of fourteen, and so on until the choices of all fifteen key influentials were weighted. The choices of all twenty-eight of the other influentials were given a weight of one. The rankings of the fifteen key school influentials were established independently from the rankings of the twenty-eight lower ranking influentials, to enable comparisons between the two lists of choices.

Results

The fifteen key influentials ranked school influentials in a significantly different order than the other twenty-eight influentials. Table 3 displays rankings by both groups, differences in rankings for each person, and types of school influentials. Those whose ranking by both groups falls within nine places are taken to be visible school influentials whose leadership roles are well established. Those ranked more than nine places higher by key influentials than they were ranked by the others are accepted as being concealed leaders whose influence is not generally acknowledged in the community. And those who were ranked by less influential persons more than nine places higher than they were ranked by key influentials, were taken to be symbolic school influentials whose real influence is generally overestimated. The difference of nine is used because it seems to delineate clearly the three types of school influentials. (Note that because only the top ten rankings for the key influentials and lower-ranking influentials were included, the names of Long and O'Neill from Table 2 were replaced by two others, Sanger and Wexler.)

TABLE 3

RANKING OF 15 INFLUENTIALS BY KEY INFLUENTIALS AND BY 28 LOWER RANKING INFLUENTIALS

Influentials	Rankings by Key Influentials	Rankings by Lower Ranking Influentials	Difference[a]	Type[b]
Anderson	1	1	0	V
Fanning	2	13.5	-11.5	C
Billingham	3	2	1	V
Dillon	4	4.5	- .5	V
Koerner	5	13.5	- 8.5	V
Merrill	6	19.5	-13.5	C
Eastman	7	4.5	2.5	V
Cooper	8	3	5	V
Gurley	9	7	2	V
Sanger	10	19.5	- 9.5	C
Henderson	12	8	4	V
Jackson	13.5	10	3.5	V
Newberg	22.5	10	12.5	S
Isaacs	no votes	6	18	S
Wexler	no votes	10	24	S

[a]The rank-order correlation for the two groups is negative. (rho computed for the first ten rankings by key influentials = -2.11)

[b]V = Visible Leader; C = Concealed Leader; S = Symbolic Leader.

Table 4 introduces validating data to support the separation of school influentials into three groups. Each of the forty-three top influentials was asked to indicate whether or not he/she comes into personal contact with each of the other individuals. When the personal

contacts indicated by every top influential are checked against those indicated by every other person, a pattern of mutually recognized personal contacts emerges. As might be expected, concealed school influentials were credited with fewer personal contacts than the group as a whole, and significantly fewer contacts than the visible or symbolic school influentials.

TABLE 4

VISIBLE, CONCEALED, AND SYMBOLIC SCHOOL INFLUENTIALS: PERSONAL CONTACT WITH OTHER SCHOOL INFLUENTIALS[a]

	Number of Other Influentials With Whom Individual is in Personal Contact
Visible School Influentials[b]	
Anderson	37
Billingham	34
Dillon	32
Koerner	28
Eastman	25
Cooper	25
Gurley	12
Henderson	16
Jackson	26
Concealed School Influentials[c]	
Fanning	11
Merrill	17
Sanger	18
Symbolic School Influentials[d]	
Newberg	32
Isaacs	32
Wexler	30

[a]Mean = 23.6 for 43 top school influentials.

[b]Mean = 26.1 for 9 key/visible school influentials.

[c]Mean = 15.3 for 3 key/concealed school influentials.

[d]Mean = 31.3 for 3 key/symbolic school influentials.

Differences in the means for the three groups of key influentials are statistically significant. ($F(2,12\ df) = 4.46$; $p < .05$)

Characteristics of Visible, Concealed, and Symbolic School Influentials, and Their Interest in Curriculum

Table 5 displays selected characteristics of fifteen visible, concealed, and symbolic school influentials and indicates responses to questions about school curriculum issues. The patterns identifiable for each type of school influential reveal a great deal about how school curriculum in Limestone County may be influenced.

TABLE 5

VISIBLE, CONCEALED, AND SYMBOLIC SCHOOL INFLUENTIALS: AGE, OCCUPATION, POLITICAL AFFILIATION, AND INVOLVEMENT IN CURRICULUM ISSUES

	Occupation	Political Affiliation	Curriculum Issue[a]	Expressed Involvement in Curriculum Issues
Visible School Influentials				
Steve Anderson age 44	Newspaper Editor	R	"no critical curriculum issue at this point"	none
Agnes Billingham age 68	Community Leader, Former School Board President	R	"upgrading the command of the English language through reading/writing skills"	in the past
Rex Dillon age 55	Lawyer, Former School Attorney	R	"lack of emphasis on basics"	none
Joseph Koerner age 74	University Chancellor	D	"the hashish in the newspaper that 'Johnny can't read and can't write,' but I don't pay much attention to it."	none
Darrer Eastman age 51	Professor of Educational Administration	R	"the bubbling concern of trying to individualize"	informal, advisory
Anne Cooper age 33	Store Owner, State Assembly Representative	D	cuts in foreign language instruction	none
Hector Gurley age 76	Industrialist	R	"no"	none
Carol Henderson age 44	Housewife of a Professor, School Foundation Board Member	R	for sex education	involved
Sue Jackson age 53	Housewife of a Machinist, Homemaker's Circle Member	R	against "psychology" and "values" in the curriculum	extremely involved

TABLE 5--Continued

	Occupation	Political Affiliation	Curriculum Issue[a]	Expressed Involvement in Curriculum Issues
Concealed School Influentials				
Phyllis Fanning age 42	Single Parent, Community Activist	D	"language arts program and the incompetence of teachers"	extremely involved
Fred Merrill age 47	Professor of Educational Research, President of School Foundation	D	"arbitrary grade standards"	informal, advisory
Mavis Sanger age 59	Housewife of a Professor, Homemaker's Circle Member	R	"Pornography" and "unisex" in the curriculum	extremely involved
Symbolic School Influentials				
Greg Newberg age 53	Newspaper City Editor	D	"schools don't relate to personal problems"	none
Ron Isaacs age 57	County Judge	R	wants home math and budgeting courses to reduce family problems	none
Bill Wexler age 49	Physician, Former School Board President	R	for sex education	none

[a]Responses to the question, "Is there an important school curriculum issue that comes to mind immediately?"

Visible school influentials

Limestone County's visible school influentials are roughly representative of the group of top influentials as a whole in age, sex, location of residence, occupation, and extent of community memberships, but seven out of nine (almost 78%) are Republican as compared with about 50% who are Republican in the group as a whole. With two exceptions, the visible school influentials do not claim to be actively involved in deciding curriculum issues.

Steve Anderson, the Republican editor of the Ridgebrook Sun, is the most important school influential in town. He is in personal contact with all but five of the other forty-two top influentials, and his paper runs articles, letters or editorials about the local schools daily--but in a "tempered" way. Speaking of his newspapers positions on several pressing curriculum issues in the district, Anderson observes that "any stand you take, you have to temper," and "we have a responsibility as a newspaper to articulate concerns, [but] we also have a responsibility to have an answer, and that tempers us."

Anderson claims that the "subtle approach" may be lost on some people in Ridgebrook when a "frontal approach" might be more effective, but he is very sensitive to accusations that his paper can be made the tool of certain groups to gain unfair advantage over others.

Although he feels there is "no critical curriculum issue at this point," Anderson does have a curriculum concern: the teaching of economics. He claims that "students don't get an objective look" at economics from textbooks, that "the high school grad is not as sympathetic

about profits as he should be," and that high school students "don't understand the complexities of business."

Agnes Billingham is one of the best known persons in Limestone County, and like the county as a whole, she embodies elements of contrast. Billingham is a widowed mother of nine who lives in a modest home on Ridgebrook's west side. At the same time, she is a Republican politician who has recently run, unsuccessfully but with considerable east side support, for the Ridgebrook mayoralty and the state assembly. And Billingham has joined a black protestant church in her neighborhood, "to give service to the black community," even though she herself is Catholic.

Billingham served on the school board for eight years, including one term as president. In 1974, she voted to close schools to save programs but not to close a school in her district, and in 1976, she voted to distribute Gideons' Bibles. Her thinking about curriculum issues is closely aligned with current district policies, but it is difficult to determine the degree to which she helped shape those policies while on the board. She is in favor of limited sex education, but against teaching about birth control. She has wanted to upgrade "the command of the English language through reading/writing skills" but now she is "delighted with present reading programs." Also, Billingham is strongly in favor of "working by objectives in evaluation," an idea she brought back from a national school board convention, because, "in order to get an efficient job done, you have to know where you're going." The management-by-objectives system currently in use in the LCCSD, now "well on its way," is in compliance with her philosophy.

Rex Dillon is a lawyer who served as school board attorney for twenty-seven years. He is now retired from that office, but he continues to advise the school district in legal matters. Dillon explains: "The schools intrigue me, or I wouldn't spend the time with them that I do, all of it, obviously, not profitable." The curriculum issue concerning Dillon is the "lack of emphasis on basics." His stand is that "it's necessary to learn to accept the things that are difficult," and that "there is some merit in learning two times two, four times four, etc." Dillon admits, however, that his involvement in curriculum questions is limited to giving an opinion if someone asks.

Joseph Koerner, the chancellor of Midwest State University, is more of a cosmopolitan than a local leader. He explains that "a lot of my time and thought is away from Ridgebrook," and "I'm no longer informed of action downtown." Admitting to no experience in elementary or secondary school matters, Koerner's belief is that, where the curriculum is concerned, "the faculty should make those decisions."

Darren Eastman is a professor of educational administration who has successfully crossed town/gown boundaries. He is a Rotary member who is well known among Ridgebrook's community leaders. Eastman directed Superintendent Gray's doctoral research at Midwest State, and he remains his friend and advisor though he is not directly involved in local curriculum issues. Eastman is "favorably tilted" toward individualized instruction, but he is well aware of its costs. He sees as his role "to call attention to" curriculum issues and to provide information, but not to take sides, for he recognizes that "there may be higher priorities"

elsewhere. An administrator has to be careful not to get himself into a "no-win" situation, he warns. Though "visible," Eastman works in an informal, advisory way often in conversation at social gatherings.

Ann Cooper is the Democrat who defeated Billingham in the last election for state assembly representative, and the youngest of the visible school influentials. As far as her school influence is concerned, Cooper is a cosmopolitan and not a local leader whose high ranking is due to her position as "the Democratic legislator in the state in charge of the schools." Cooper deplores cuts made locally in foreign language instruction because she is a former language teacher, but she says she has "not been involved personally with curriculum issues."

Hector Gurley is the wealthiest person in town and one of the most conservative. Founder and owner of electronics and mass communication corporations, Gurley supports ultra-conservative foundations and journals. An advertisement of his in one such journal reads: "There is Opportunity in America!" Gurley does not get involved in school curriculum issues even though he had served on district committees and he is a member of the foundation. Nevertheless, Gurley has distinct curriculum preferences: He wants the "basic facts of our American heritage and free enterprise system" taught, to include emphasis on "the benefits which accrued." According to him, the American system gives "freedom and the good life," and any defects in the system are due to "human greed."

Carol Henderson, a former teacher, spends a great deal of her time working on formal school committees. She is a member of her local

and county PTA councils, the School Foundation Board of Directors, and the school district's Testing Committee. In recent years, she has worked on the textbook adoption committees. She was active during the 1974 budget crisis trying to save the old elementary school serving her neighborhood because it "stressed fundamentals." Furthermore, Henderson has personal friends who are leaders in the teachers' association and in Planned Parenthood, and her husband is a member of Rotary.

Henderson supports sex education in the schools--she "doesn't think we can go on as we have in this school district not mentioning words such as 'abortion' and 'contraception,'" but she seems to understand the district's reluctance to broaden the sex education curriculum. She stresses that more change can be brought about informally and socially than through official channels.

It has been said of Sue Jackson that there is one like her in every town. Superintendent Gray calls her part of the town's "lunatic fringe," and he has admitted to her that she makes him very nervous when she is around. She is well known for her angry outbursts at public meetings but perhaps less well known for her tremendous efforts on behalf of her chosen causes. A friend of hers in the reactionary woman's group, the Homemaker's Circle, calls Jackson "one of the most active and aroused homemakers in the state," and says of her admiringly: "Jackson can pursue various federal mischiefs that nobody even recognizes."

Jackson resents what she calls newspaper censorship of her attendance at public meetings because, "when you think of censorship, you think of only one thing--communism." She talks schools and politics

with everyone she meets, and she regularly writes letters to the newspaper. In one letter to the newspaper, Jackson invited parents to a PTA council meeting to review textbooks; her litany of complaints about textbooks is quoted as follows:

> 1. Children are being turned away from parental belief and are being told that times have changed.
> 2. Teaching methods portray parents in a bad light.
> 3. Parents don't care about their children.
> 4. Parents don't understand their children and children must make their own decisions and values. Children's opinions are as good as their parents' opinions.
> 5. Stealing and lying are not always wrong and are excused or rationalized.
> 6. God is a myth, the ten commandments are outmoded and man is only an animal with ability to reason.
> 7. Less space is given to our founding fathers than to modern "heroes" such as Marilyn Monroe, The Beattles (sic), DuBois, a Communist, etc.
> 8. Our founding fathers are put in a bad light and called agitators, radicals and extremists. Their motives are questioned or said to be selfish.
> 9. America is put in a bad light.
> 10. History is omitted or distorted and Communist countries are shown in a reasonably good light.
> 11. Socialism is taught as good in that government should take care of the needs of people instead of each person being self responsible.
> 12. Free enterprise and capitalism is downgraded or not taught at all.[16]

To a great extent, Sue Jackson's influence on school curriculum decision-making is related to her power to make people nervous. Often decisions are made in her favor, unknown to her, because decision-makers do not want to provoke her. The extreme reluctance of the district to make minor improvements in the sex education curriculum is perhaps a case in point. And too, some school officials have admitted privately that they are in sympathy with many of her ideas, though not with her methods.

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[16] Ridgebrook Sun, November 18, 1975.

The makeup of the visible school influentials as a whole is a reflection of the character of curriculum decision-making in Limestone County. The two liberal Democrats operate on state and national levels and have little at least directly to do with the local schools. One of the two persons interested in curriculum is a member of a fringe group, and the other, having all the best intentions and connections, is unable to bring about much change. The remaining five persons are conservatives who are content with leaving curriculum decisions in the hands of individual teachers just as long as such "basics" as reading, writing, figuring, and the profit motive are adequately covered.

Concealed school influentials

As a group, the concealed school influentials in Limestone County are very interested in curriculum issues, and they have articulate rationales for the positions they hold. Interestingly, all three of the concealed school influentials thought the following statement to be false, while less than one third of the other top influentials thought so: "Important and sensitive curriculum decisions are influenced by several groups of citizens working together in the community." Although they are in agreement here, Fanning, Merrill and Sanger are not likely to be in accord on much else.

Phyllis Fanning has brought about as much change in the LCCSD as any other single citizen, and in view of her status as a concealed leader, she is not generally given much credit. She claims personal responsibility for the decision to keep Gideons' Bibles out of the schools, for the decision to remove an ultra-conservative newsletter

from a rack in the school district's central office, for the decision to revise attendance and gym shorts policies, and for the decision to replace a controversial principal. "I'm my own project," she explains. A lawyer by inclination if not formal training, Fanning often spends days in the Midwest State University law school library researching cases. When she presents her findings to the school board, she argues her points logically and in painstaking legal detail.

In the wake of the school board's narrow decision to ban Bibles, Fanning wrote a half-page, two-column essay as a letter to the Ridgebrook Sun. A key paragraph is quoted as follows:

> There were,--and still are, "overwhelming reasons" for denial of permission to distribute Biblical literature in public schools. Madison and Jefferson were well aware of these reasons, and so were the many minority religious groups they united to ensure the enactment of the Virginia Bill for Religious Liberty. It was to uphold principles derived in part from reason and in part from experience of persecution and suppression that the First Amendment was adopted shortly thereafter. Most Americans then understood that the "power and prestige of government must not be used to control, support or otherwise influence" the people's religious beliefs and practices lest these be endangered each time a new political administration comes into office. Unfortunately, many modern Americans, including a number of our School Trustees, are either unacquainted with these "overwhelming reasons" or choose to cite them only to further their own interests. Such Americans not only imperil the rights of others who are not of the same persuasion, but they ultimately put their own rights in jeopardy,--albeit unwittingly. . . .[17]

An indication of Fanning's influence is the fact that her name pops up all over the district, in faculty meetings ("I'm going to sic Phyllis Fanning on you!") and in staff meetings. In one staff meeting, her name was invoked in half-feigned fear on three separate occasions.

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[17] Ridgebrook Sun, August 2, 1976.

Fanning's curriculum interests are wide-ranging and not easily summarized. A common theme, however, is her disenchantment with the district's teachers. She is "in despair" about the language arts program, the "incompetence" of the teachers, and students' poor grammar. Currently she is compiling a "Compendium of Cacography," an encyclopedia of instances of teachers' poor grammar which she will release to the press. She claims that student teachers are not properly supervised, and that the district hires incompetents and then is slow to fire them.

Fanning works alone, by and large. She is not a joiner, and she is not a member of Ridgebrook's power structure. Indeed, her tactics and criticisms are not popular in a community inclined toward compromise.

Fred Merrill is a man behind-the-scenes in the governance of the local schools. Merrill is professor of educational research at Midwest State, and the president of the School Foundation, but he is not as well known among community leaders as Professor Eastman, for example. Merrill's influence is exerted more by force of intellect than by power, status or authority.

Merrill considers the LCCSD to be "in a state of relative stability in terms of curriculum issues . . . maybe over-stability." Furthermore, current discussions are not on core issues." The continuing debates over sex education in Limestone County are illustrative of "fringe issues of little consequence" that "arbitrary grade standards" (minimal competency requirements) about which he predicts there will be debate in the district, is "a good, cogent, central issue in curriculum." It is also an issue that he and Gray conferred about before it became known publicly that the district was even interested.

Mavis Sanger is the guiding force in the Homemaker's Circle, a group of "conservative women with home interests," but she is more interested in defeating the Equal Rights Amendment than in working with the schools. Nevertheless, Sanger remains active in school issues, and she retains some strong opinions about education. Concerning television: "I regard it as an enemy of literacy and recently an enemy or morality." Concerning her early training at the Lincoln School: "As an early victim of the progressive method, I can attack it with some feeling." As for the magazine Learning: it is "Lincoln School gone wild," something to read "to see what the enemy is up to." Values Clarification, the famous handbook of classroom techniques, "is an evil, evil book" that "has done absolutely, indescribable damage." The following quotation is taken from one of her essays about school textbooks:

> Insofar as the homemaker is demoralized and undermined by "career" and "professional" women and women who do not understand America, the children she rears will be less capable, less intelligent, less loving, less lovable, less honorable, less reliable, less skillful human beings. It is to the interest of all patriotic American men to ally themselves with those of us who build human personality, against the women who weaken the home and thus weaken America--the last hope of the world.
>
> We demand that textbooks bought with our taxes to instruct our children in the schools we support will realistically represent the sexes as different in aptitudes, interests, muscular strength, skills and occupational preferences. The schools have allowed dangerous and shameful falsifying of American life. Textbooks which abet this sabotage must be removed.

Sanger is very opposed to sex education in the schools. "The old system of having one lecture in biology class is adequate." Furthermore, she explains, "it does not go over very well in the county to say 'what you need to do is copulate.'" Her "enemies" are "the public

education monopoly," the "heavy hand" of the school of education, and professional educators in general. Sanger's speech is peppered with military phrases--the public is "mobilizing"; her own role is that of a "sniper" and not an "NCO," etc. But, surprisingly, she considers her field to be English literature and domestic literature, and she is most fond of literary descriptive accounts of rural English villages.

What comes through from face-to-face discussion with the three concealed leaders is the enormous strength with which they hold to their values and the considerable intellectual talents they are able to muster in pursuit of their goals. Each represents a clear claim on the schools which the curriculum is unable to satisfy and which the district's policy of compromise only frustrates. Fanning, the civil libertarian, is enraged by school regulations that deprive students of their rights, and she is saddened by damage done to students by people whom she considers to be incompetent educators. Merrill, the pragmatist and professional, understands the environment of public education as well as anyone, and yet the school district is unable to use his expertise. Sanger, the conservative ideologue, is a true reactionary who opposes change in any direction except the eighteenth century. That the influence of these three persons is "concealed" suggests that the inherent conflicts in public education which Fanning, Merrill and Sanger threaten to exacerbate are generally not well understood in the community at large.

Symbolic school influentials

Newberg, Isaacs and Wexler are "influential" but not for reasons of current interest in the schools, of which they have little. They are

well known and as a group more in contact with other leaders than even the visible school influentials, but their influence is symbolic.

Newberg is ranked highly by virtue of his position as city editor for the Ridgebrook Sun, but his involvement in curriculum or school decision-making is limited to having written articles in the past about Planned Parenthood, for instance. He might write an article in the future that would touch upon a curriculum issue, he says, but he would not attempt to organize people nor would he ever "make signs and picket."

Isaacs is an immensely influential leader in the affairs of the city due to his position as judge and due to his old family/old money status. As far as the public school curriculum is concerned, however, Isaacs has little to say except that he sees too many divorce cases, and he wants the curriculum to assist young married persons discharge their financial obligations. It is Isaacs' feeling that the schools are doing as well as they can in most areas, and that the "experts" should be free to decide curriculum issues.

Bill Wexler is a general practitioner, once president of the school board, who denies having influence any longer. "I am not actively involved in the school district," he admits, and "if I was selected as having influence right now, it's not true, because I really don't." Wexler remains in personal contact with thirty of the top school influentials, but, he maintains, he is just a "has-been."

The identification of symbolic school leaders shows that position, status, or past accomplishment does not, in and of itself, mean a person is influential in a school district.

Discussion

The Bonjean-Noland technique--the comparison of rankings by key influentials and lower ranking influentials and the classification of leaders into three types based upon differences in ranking--has been successfully replicated in this study, with the focus being influence on schools. A significant difference was found in the rankings of the two sets of "school influentials," and patterned differences between the three categories of leaders were revealed.

In Limestone County, the visible and concealed school influentials appear to have more influence over school decision-making than the symbolic leaders who owe their high ranking to position, status or past accomplishment rather than to direct involvement with the schools. Only the concealed influentials as a group are very conversant with curriculum issues; the visible leaders take less interest in curriculum, and the symbolic leaders almost none. Finally, the tenor of curriculum claims advanced by visible leaders is socially conservative--there is talk of basics, and objectives, and free enterprise. The concealed leaders, on the other hand, though not in agreement, are inclined to question and to challenge. Symbolic leaders are not overtly involved with school curriculum.

The reputational approach follows the principle that social situations defined as real by the actors themselves, <u>are</u> real. It can be stated with some confidence, therefore, that the persons identified as school influentials in Limestone County are indeed influential in school decision-making. Reputational inquiry is useful for "naming names"

of influentials, but still it is clearly inadequate to the task of explaining why decisions are made as they are, and it comes perilously close to making some questionable assumptions. For example, there is the suggestion that a one-to-one relationship between influentials and issues exists, which seems not to be the case at all. Most key influentials are not issue-oriented; their power stems from some more general force than immediate involvement in specific outcomes. There is also the assumption that overt activity gets things done, which might be true in the case of Phyllis Fanning, for instance, but which does not explain why symbolic leaders or some of the seemingly uninvolved visible leaders are reputed to have influence.

A few obvious questions not answered by the data include the following: Are people reluctant to question the accepted ways of doing things unless pushed by conditions that promise personal advantage or threaten personal loss? How is a person like Hector Gurley who pays no attention to school issues able to have his way, more or less, with the curriculum? Does a person like Judge Isaacs actually derive more influence by staying at the edge of issues and never taking a public stance? Why is it that Sue Jackson can scream "parents" or "God" or "America" and automatically gain an advantage? What explains Phyllis Fanning's uncanny notoriety? It is more than possible, after all, that deep cultural forces are at work in Limestone County which shape events but go entirely undetected by the reputational format. Some modest theoretical speculation appears to be in order.

What is needed to interpret relationships between community and curriculum and between local influence and local decisions is a comprehensive theory of culture and control in the local community. In what sense is one's actions determined by the culture of the community? Is there, in effect, a "community ideology" present in Limestone County or elsewhere which patterns local decisions?

According to Geertz, there are two major interpretations of the social determinants of ideology, the interest theory and the strain theory.[18] The two interpretations are not contradictory, but each offers a different and useful perspective for understanding the role of school curriculum in the local community.

According to interest theory (Marxism is the chief example), ideology is a form of false consciousness that legitimates the status quo and serves the interests of society's dominant classes.[19] Ideology is more than just a matter of political economics, however, for interest theory generally assumes there to be a constant and universal struggle for advantage in which ideology is a force that infuses culture. Gramsci, the Italian Marxist, posited the notion of "ideological hegemony" to emphasize the fact that ideology exists in many forms. Ideological hegemony is, as Boggs writes:

> . . . the permeation throughout civil society--including a whole range of structures and activities like trade unions, schools, the churches, and the family--of an entire system

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[18]Clifford Geertz, "Ideology As a Cultural System," Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 201.

[19]Michael Apple, "Rationality as Ideology," Essay Review of Reason and Rhetoric, by Walter Feinberg, Educational Theory, XXVI, No. 1 (Winter, 1976), 122.

> of values, attitudes, beliefs, morality, etc., that is in one way or another supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate it. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalized by the broad masses, it becomes part of "common sense" . . . .[20]

What is the "common sense" ideology of Limestone County? For most people, it is "getting along by going along," deferring to the county's influentials on important questions, and generally behaving as people believe the influentials expect them to behave. The group of top school influentials is, as a whole, a rational, agreeable, well-meaning and conservative bunch of people. They are in frequent contact with each other during the normal course of events, and they retain an abiding interest in the fortunes of the community. Limestone County, for all its disparities, remains a low-key, down-home sort of place, where modest change is not allowed to occur until there is a general consensus within the community that the status quo is somehow deficient.

According to strain theory (where Durkheim and Parsons are two of the best known proponents), ideology is a patterned reaction to cultural tensions and discontinuities whose purpose is to reduce strain. Ideology's function is "to render otherwise incomprehensible social situations meaningful, to so construe them as to make it possible to act purposefully within them."[21] In Limestone County, cultural strain exists as a result

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[20]Carl Boggs, Gramsci's Marxism (London: Pluto Press, 1976), p. 39. James B. Macdonald quoted this passage in "Curriculum, Consciousness and Social Change," Paper read at the Kent State University Curriculum Theory Conference (Kent, Ohio: November 12, 1977), p. 4.

[21]Geertz, p. 220.

of its social contrasts and dichotomous power alignments, and the community's preferences for deliberation, compromise and conflict-avoidance may be best understood as key elements in its ideology.

Top school influentials, with a few obvious exceptions, consistently act to reduce anxiety in the community. Steve Anderson, to note one, embraces a "tempered" approach to newspaper editorship. Most influentials hold unthreatening views of public education. Few are willing to create a stir or cause a fuss. Most speak of shared values, coalitional leadership, sense of community.

Interest theory applied to the local community would see curriculum as the imposition of a community's legitimating meanings on its young. For strain theory, curriculum could be likened to a batch of cultural glue whose purpose is to bond a community's sense of self. In the former, curriculum solidifies the dominant classes; in the latter, curriculum reduces the "patterned desperation" of community members.

The goal of an "anti-interest" curriculum, it would seem, is liberation from the ideological grip of the status quo. "Anti-strain" curriculum, meanwhile, would have as its aim the genuine integration of culture. Each goal or aim involves the task of expanding critical consciousness as a necessary precondition for social change.

To the extent that community ideology is taken for granted in Limestone County, it can be expected that school curriculum represents an uncritical ordering of reality. Without instructions to the contrary, teachers are likely to respond to the expectations of persons they consider to be community influentials. Thus they impart their personal

versions of "recipe knowledge" needed to conduct day-to-day transactions in the community while neglecting to engage in critical consciousness-raising and reflexive thinking about "common sense."[22] When ideology is not openly inspected in school, students are unsuspectingly socialized into thinking that the accepted belief structure of the community is objective social reality. The result is school curriculum that presents a reified view of reality as "what-is" (as opposed to a view which posits reality as "what-is-and-what-could-be" or "should-be") and thus stifles the creative force of human consciousness.

In order to break the cycle of curriculum legitimating ideology, ideology patterning curriculum, the substance of curriculum needs to be shifted from recipe knowledge to critical consciousness. Just how to move curriculum decision-making to discussions about consciousness, and just how to develop curriculum substance that can change ideological consciousness and ultimately improve social conditions, constitutes the challenge of curriculum work in the local community.[23]

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[22] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 42. As Bowers points out: "Learning to compete in institutional settings, learning how to adapt to depersonalized roles, learning to work for a grade, learning how to maintain sex-role as well as hierarchical-role relationships, learning how to manage the boundaries of private and social space, are just a few examples of 'recipe knowledge' taught by schools." C. A. Bowers "Emergent Ideological Characteristics of Educational Policy," Teachers College Record, LXXIX, No. 1 (September, 1977), 34.

[23] Macdonald suggests the following guidelines for curriculum substance intended to develop new consciousness for social change. They are offered only as possible points-of-departure.

1. Curriculum substance must be directly related to needs, interests, past experiences and capabilities of persons.
2. Substance should be so organized as to allow for maximum possible

Conclusion

To return to the reported findings, the identification of school influentials can be fully grasped only within the context of their community. On one level, the isolation of visible, concealed and symbolic influentials debunks the view that a monolithic leadership structure exists in Limestone County. But on another level, it is suspected that school curriculum plays an ideological role in the community, whether it be "interest" or "strain" that one perceives. The community, it would seem, has the schools it wants, and it needs the schools it has.

The core finding is that those who influence curriculum decision-making in the local community do not work overtly. To a large extent, their power is in the minds of others who, for unknown reasons, allow themselves to be influenced. Mysteriously, school curriculum and school influentials, with a few exceptions, are simpatico.

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variation between persons.

3. Substance should be organized so that it reveals to the greatest possible extent its instrumental and interpretive relevance to the social world.
4. Substance should be organized so that its meaning for the everyday living of the persons involved is apparent.
5. Substance should be organized so that the cognitive and affective relationships within and between usually disparate areas are apparent.
6. Substance should be organized so that all areas of the curriculum contribute directly to the creation of meaning structures which deal with the human condition.
7. And finally, substance should be organized so that the overall concern is the development of broad meaning structures, human values, attitudes, and moral understandings.

James B. Macdonald, "Curriculum, Consciousness and Social Change," paper read at the Kent State University Curriculum Theory Conference, Kent, Ohio, November 12, 1977, p. 12.

This finding, however, was a side effect of the reputational method. Reputational analysis promises one thing (a list of people held to be influential), which it delivers, and it adds something rather different (insiders' perspectives of the life of a community). Thus the reputational format holds promise for researchers interested in the social contexts of curriculum decision-making, most promise perhaps in studies of comparative or longitudinal design, but only when the method itself is adequately understood. Two caveats appear to be in order.

First, note that the reputational technique is a (risky) research tool--definitely not a public relations ploy. When school officials use the technique as a way to communicate with community leaders, for example, serious legal, political and democratic-ethical problems are raised. In the fall of 1978, Superintendent Gray organized a series of breakfast meetings, closed to the public, in which he and other LCCSC administrators gave their side of the dispute over teachers' contract negotiations. Gray invited over a hundred people whom he termed "power actors," including about twenty-five of the forty-three identified school influentials, in order to relay his version of "pure information." A public protest ensued. The Ridgebrook Sun editorialized against the breakfast talks and printed the following letter from two citizens:

> To the editor:
> We consider the so-called "information breakfasts" between officials of the Limestone Community School Corporation and specially selected "community leaders" to be highly offensive, anti-democratic, and elitist.
>
> The school administration's autocratic manipulation of information and public opinion is outrageous and completely unacceptable.
>
> We have the following questions: Who are the "community leaders" and how were they identified? Why is it necessary

> for these "leaders" to have a special and exclusive explanation of the school board's position on teacher negotiations? Are the parents of children in the schools not as concerned or less important?
>
> If the LCCSC administration is seriously committed to the goal of extensive community input into decision making, then it should put an end to these closed-door sessions with the power elite of the county.[24]

Phyllis Fanning was not invited, and she filed suit to halt the talks, claiming violations of both state open meeting laws and school board policies. The suit failed, but Gray, somewhat miffed by all the "ballyhoo" and not really understanding the issues, admits he may never use the strategy again, at least during labor negotiations. The warning for researchers is that studies using the reputational method always risk becoming the subjects of their own investigation.

Second, an assumed characteristic of the reputational method is that it weighs reputations more heavily than actions, and so its very use often results in the discovery of elitism and hierarchy. As Walton has shown, the findings of much research into community power formations are often "artifacts" of method.[25] Thus, reputational methods may need to be dovetailed with other field research techniques in order to reduce "artifact effect."

How do curriculum and community interact? Reputational methods can be used to take a cut at this problem, but other cuts are needed. The recommendation here is that research is most apt to be useful when

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[24] Ridgebrook Sun, October 3, 1978.

[25] John Walton, "Substance and Artifact: The Current Status of Research on Community Power," American Journal of Sociology, LXXI, No. 4 (January, 1966), 430-38.

it is undertaken in natural settings, is reliant upon qualitative methods of data collection, is directed by naturalistic paradigms of inquiry, and is situated within larger cultural, historical and ideological contexts. This is indeed a weighty agenda for curriculum research, yet one merited by the substantive issues at hand.

Appendix

Reputational Interview Protocol

From the following list of persons who are active in Ridgebrook civic life, please indicate whether or not you come into personal contact with each individual (face-to-face, by letter or phone).

Name of Person	Contact?	Circumstances?
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a. Without passing judgment on them or on their ideas, please name the five persons from the list whom you feel are most influential in initiating, supporting or vetoing actions that have considerable effect on our schools. You may add names of your own choosing if they are not on my list, but do not include members of the school board or school district staff.

b. Is there an important school curriculum issue that comes to mind immediately? What is it?

c. What is your stand on the issue?

d. Are you actively involved with the issue? If so, what are you doing?

e. Do you think that you can affect the outcome of the issue?

f. As you may know, a current school curriculum issue concerns family life/sex education. The school board has appointed a task force to reconsider state guidelines. If the curriculum is expanded to include detailed information about birth control, what would be your personal stand?

g. How did you first become aware of this issue?

h. Have you contacted others about this issue? If so, how?

i. What persons or groups are actively in support of expanding the family life/sex education curriculum to include the topic of birth control?

j. What persons or groups are actively opposed?

k. What might you do if the final decision of the task force is not to your liking?

l. What are the important sources of your thinking when it comes to the school curriculum?

m. TRUE OR FALSE: Important and sensitive curriculum decisions are influenced by several groups of citizens working together in the community. (Explain.)